

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION & SKILLS SCRUTINY BOARD - 5
January 2023**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON THURSDAY 5TH JANUARY 2023

Present: Councillors: Y Clements, B Donnelly, S Gethen, D Gibbin (Chairman), B Groom, J Hamilton, A Mackenzie and G Sleigh.

Independent Members: H Delaney and S Golby.

Present Virtually: Councillors: L McCarthy, A Wilson, A Rebeiro and J Tildesley.

Officers: James Hughes – Democratic Services Officer
Peter Campbell – Director of Children's Services
Sarah Cheale – Finance Manager (Children's Services)
Natalie Goulding – Employment and Skills Programme Manager
Tom Dixon – Employment and Skills Manager
Tim Browne – Assistant Director (Education) – Virtual

Apologies: Councillors: A Burrow, D Holl-Allen MBE and R Holt]
Independent Members: S Freeman

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from:

- Cllr A Burrow with Cllr Mrs G Sleigh attending as a substitution.
- Cllr R Holt with Cllr Mrs D Holl-Allen MBE attending as a substitution but sending her apologies.
- Stephanie Freeman (SPCV) with Heather Delaney attending as a substitution.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY OR CONFLICTING INTERESTS FROM MEMBERS

Cllr L McCarthy declared an interest to the Chairman.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 1st November 2022 were approved with all actions arising marked as complete.

4. QUESTIONS AND DEPUTATIONS

There had been one request made by a member of the public to make a deputation. The member of the public was not in attendance and therefore the deputation was not made.

5. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) UPDATE - BUDGET STRATEGY 2023/24 - 2025/26

The Finance Manager (Children's Services) presented the report in conjunction with the Director of Children's Services. Questions were as follows:

- Cllr B Groom – With OFSTED/Commissioner and the LGA Peer Review reports all being anticipated shortly, how much of the outcomes we expect to see in these reports has been baked into the budget we have received tonight?
 - Director of Children's Services – We have included the outcomes as best we can and also looked to other Councils who have experienced similar intervention as we are now. What tends to happen is that staff morale drops, and we see an increase in staff turnover as a result. The biggest unknown in terms of the reports and the one with the highest impact on the service, Sir Alan Wood's CBE report would be the one to look out for.

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- Cllr B Groom – In terms of the savings that have been presented in the report the majority look to be savings as a result of in housing provision. Is there any further in housing that we could do in the future?
 - Finance Manager (Children's Services) – There is an inbuilt year on year savings in terms of the fostering service, the small residential homes scheme is unlikely to be able to stretch further but will always keep schemes under review for any potential expansion to save. The Service and Resources Directorate are always looking ahead over the current and future MTFP to identify where we can make savings.
- Heather Delaney (SPCV) – Is there more work that could be done on joint commissioning to limit the burden to the Council and encourage our partners to pay their fair share?
 - Director of Children's Services – Yes, we are looking at this currently and in particular at the LSCP. There is potential around joint arrangements with other Local Authorities and a more regional approach to, for example, buying residential placements in block.
- Cllr Mrs G Sleigh – Can you provide more depth on item 1.20 (Social Work Recruitment and Retention and staff development) as to what work we are doing and whether we can do more as a region?
 - Director of Children's Services – The recruitment and retention of Social Work staff is a challenge everywhere. As a sector we are seeing fewer professionals join the profession and increasing demand from service users. The key is how we differ in our approach to recruiting new staff and we need to adapt to the desired lifestyle that graduates now want which is more aligned to agency working and we can be smarter in our approach here. However, there will always be the key fundamentals which are job fulfilment, support in your role and progression which will be key to attracting and retaining staff alongside this we also need to shout about what we are doing well and what we are good at as a service. There is work currently ongoing to develop an academy for new staff into the profession and this will hopefully have a positive impact.
- Cllr A Rebeiro – On p.13 1.24 (Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) – when will we know more from the Department of Education on the results of their consultation on their SEND review to improve the experience for children and young people?
 - Director of Children's Services – There has been further information and guidance provided by the Department since the report was written. We ourselves will be undertaking a Peer Review on our SEND offer the week after next and we could look to bring forward an item on the results of this.
 - Cllr D Gibbin – I would like to ask the Assistant Director of Education to produce a briefing note on the scale of the changes that will be implemented and the potential cost impact to the Council in regard to the review undertaken at a national level.
ACTION: Assistant Director of Education to produce a briefing paper on the SEND changes proposed at National level.
- Cllr A Rebeiro – On p.14 1.25 (Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)) can I just confirm whether that amount will change?
 - Finance Manager (Children's Services) – The figure in the report is the Period 6 figure, the Period 9 figure is currently being calculated and will be reported to the Cabinet in due time.
- Sajida Golby – Can we have more of a breakdown on the Child Protection Plan data?

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- Director of Children's Services – Yes, we can break it down further, there is no outlier from the national statistics, but we can provide a further breakdown to you.
ACTION: JH to confirm what data SG would like and liaise with DCS to secure data.
- Sajida Golby – In relation to p.11 1.19 9 (Early Help Level 2) how much conversation is going on at the ground level with the parents?
 - Director of Children's Services – Dialogue is important as there is no point in engaging in an activity if it is not going to meet the need. The services that we provide must be responsive to needs as they change. This year Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council will embark on a formal partnership with Leeds City Council on their 'Family Valued' programme where engagement is a big factor. We can't take a one size fits all approach when it comes to engagement.
ACTION: Cllr DG to confirm what levels of consultation happens in the North of the Borough.
- Cllr L McCarthy – On p.10 1.17 VI the report says we will recruit a LADO. Did we not have one before?
 - Director of Children's Services – We have always had LADO provision, but this was done on a rota basis as part of a share role approach. We will be moving to having a permanent LADO role that is not shared.
- Cllr L McCarthy – On p.12 1.22 (Child Protection Review Unit (CPRU)) the report talks about IRO case load levels and comparing them to other figures. Which figures are we comparing too?
 - Director of Children's Services – I believe the comparison is from the IRO Handbook recommended levels.
- Cllr Y Clements – On p.11 item 1.20 (Social Work Recruitment and Retention and staff development) with the increase in demand expected to continue do we need to increase staff levels year on year? Can we have a table showing now vs expected levels and then data showing the previous year's levels so we can track trends?
 - Director of Children's Services – I don't have that detail to hand, but we can look to provide it for you. The intervention/prevention work that we have planned will be key to the staffing numbers as we move forward, and it is unlikely we will see an impact until approximately Year 3 of that work.
ACTION: JH to liaise with Cllr YC to confirm what data is wanted and then work with DCS to secure it.
- Cllr A Wilson – Item 4.1 (Environment) what work is ongoing in the Council's effort to reduce its impact on the environment?
 - Cllr D Gibbin – It may be best to look at the budget for the Cabinet Portfolio Holder - Climate Change, Planning & Housing as there would be more detail in efforts the Council is taking as a whole.
 - Director of Children's Services – There are some things that we can do to limit the impact for example when we look to place a Looked After Child, we would seek to place them as locally as possible.
 - Finance Manager (Children's Services) – There has been a saving identified in the budget through Officer Transport Costs, we have seen that the New Ways of Working and increased level of remote working has saved us money but will also have reduced the service's impact on the environment.
- Cllr S Gethen – On p.13 1.24 (Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP)) are the levels we are hoping to reduce caseloads by then manageable for staff?

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- Director of Children's Services – No, we need to reduce caseloads further from that reduced figure. In the budget we have built in an additional 2 roles per year for the next year to try and keep up with demand and reduce pressure on staff.
- Cllr S Gethen – Again on p.13 1.24 (Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) it is stated that within Solihull we have seen a 16% increase the past 12 months. Will some of these be people who have applied before but been rejected and if so, how many?
 - Director of Children's Services – Yes some of them will have.
 - Finance Manager (Children's Services) – Some of this work is included in the Delivering Best Value work that has been ongoing and there will be a full report on this in March.
 - Assistant Director (Education) – Whilst we have accounted for an increase in the number of EHCP roles there still remains a number of unknowns with the impact that the changes at the National level will have – as things stand, they would be significant in terms of the further burden they would place on Local Authorities. We are waiting on the delivery plan for this which is already overdue. Further to this we also have the new OFSTED inspection framework which will also see an increase in resource levels.

In terms of whether we agree to an EHCP assessment or not the factors vary considerably – for example with schools requests for an EHCP assessment around 80% of those you would expect to be agreed to because they have carried out all the information gathering needed. When parents request an EHCP assessment, this number is quite low, often we are gathering information throughout the whole process, so you end up potentially changing the decision right towards the tribunal hearing because we have then been able to gather the sufficient information. To countenance this, we have changed the way we handle parent requests so that when a request is made by the parent, we send the paperwork to the school to complete so we can gather as much information we can as early as possible to avoid having to get to the tribunal stage.

- Cllr A Mackenzie – Parents and Carers have been so isolated over the last few years due to COVID-19. Informal parent groups used to help connect parents together to talk about issues and I understand Family Support Workers used to attend the meetings from time to time to help – will this be happening again?
 - Director of Children's Services – I can see the value that informal networks can have, we saw the pandemic pull the carpet from underneath longstanding informal networks and re-establishing them is so important moving forward.

RESOLVED

- The board noted the pressures and mitigating actions set out in Appendix A
- The board considered the schedule of fees and charges proposed for 2023/24, as attached at Appendix B.

The decisions were agreed unanimously, and no comments were made to be passed to the Resources and Delivering Value Scrutiny Board and Full Cabinet for February 2023

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6. VERBAL UPDATE ON THE IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN IN SOLIHULL PLAN

The Director of Children's Services gave a verbal update which noted the huge levels of information, focus and recommendations that the service received from various partners/agencies. With the upcoming reports of OFSTED, Commissioner and LGA Peer Review on Finance there was a need to change the way we present plans.

Moving forward the service will work from two plans:

- Childrens Social Care Plan – this will be informed by the findings of OFSTED.
- Multi-agency Plan – This will be overseen by the Improving Outcomes for Children in Solihull Board (IOCSB).

The Director for Children's Services informed the board that by the next meeting, in March, the Children's Social Care Plan should be available for the Board to scrutinise.

RESOLVED

The Board noted the Verbal Update.

7. SUPPORT FOR 16+ CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE

The Employment & Skills Programme Manager presented the report supported by the Employment and Skills Manager. Questions included:

- Cllr S Gethen – Do all schools work well with your team?
 - Employment and Skills Programme Manager – We work closely with the schools careers teams but naturally some communicate with us more than others. We are looking at how we communicate externally to ensure that we aren't using jargon/abbreviations.
- Cllr S Gethen – Does your team support children/young people with SEND?
 - Employment and Skills Manager – Yes, we do.
- Cllr D Gibbin – On p.28 3.6 the number of NEET is increasing – is this a sign that the programme may not be working as well as it could be?
 - Employment and Skills Programme Manager – I think it is hard to use the 2020 statistics as a starting point for analysis due to the nature of the year with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Cllr D Gibbin – Are providing support for Solihull children/young people that are then placed outside of the Borough?
 - Employment and Skills Manager – We try and find them the support for where they are, that may be referring them to the Local Authority where they are placed. We try to do what we can where possible.
- Cllr D Gibbin – The report identifies that the European Social Fund funding will expire in December 2023 with the Shared Prosperity Fund Funding not coming in until around April 2023. What will this mean for the team?
 - Employment and Skills Programme Manager – We will be reporting to Cabinet in June on priorities for the service and how we can utilise the funding of the Shared Prosperity Fund.
ACTION: The report that will be sent to Cabinet in June is to be circulated to members of the CSESSB.
- Cllr A Wilson – What would be the reason that 2 of the young people are not suitable for the labour market?
 - Employment and Skills Programme Manager – We always follow up with people that have been deemed not suitable for the labour market to ensure that if their circumstances have changed, we can support them,

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but the reasons tend to be very serious in which we wouldn't expect their circumstances to change.

- Cllr L McCarthy – Do the 34 children that have been identified include children under Kinship Care arrangements?
 - Employment and Skills Manager – Yes

RESOLVED

The board considered the support available for Care Experienced Young People.

8. INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE TASK & FINISH GROUP REPORT UPDATE & NEXT STEPS

The Democratic Services Officer for the Board introduced the report.

RESOLVED

The Board agreed to close down the Task and Finish Group.

9. WORK PLAN

RESOLVED:

The Board noted the Work Plan. Due to the large number of items planned for March the Board agreed to start the meeting at 17:00pm.

Meeting closed at 7.46 pm